

AN APPEAL FOR JUSTICE

**TESTIMONY BY ALMA Q. KERNS,
NATIONAL CHAIR, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FILIPINO AMERICAN
ASSOCIATIONS (NAFFAA)**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FEBRUARY 15, 2007**

GOOD MORNING.

I THANK YOU, CONGRESSMAN FILNER AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, FOR THIS HISTORIC HEARING ON THE FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY BILL OF 2007.

I AM DEEPLY HONORED TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FILIPINO AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS. FOUNDED 10 YEARS AGO, OUR FEDERATION AIMS TO EMPOWER THE 2.4 MILLION FILIPINOS IN AMERICA TO BECOME ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS AND LEADERS IN ALL ASPECTS OF U.S. SOCIETY. THE FILIPINO POPULATION IS AMONG THE FASTEST GROWING ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE COUNTRY TODAY, WITH ONE OF THE HIGHEST NATURALIZATION RATES AND A 76 PERCENT NATIONWIDE VOTER TURN OUT. WE HAVE SIGNIFICANT CONCENTRATIONS OF FILIPINO AMERICANS IN ALMOST EVERY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT THROUGHOUT THE NATION. I DON'T EXAGGERATE WHEN I SAY THAT THERE IS A FILIPINO IN EVERY TOWN AND CITY IN THE UNITED STATES – EACH ONE CONTRIBUTING SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE POLITICAL, CULTURAL, COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THIS COUNTRY.

I AM HERE BEFORE YOU TODAY PRIMARILY AS THE DAUGHTER OF A WORLD WAR II VETERAN. MY FATHER AND FOUR UNCLES SURVIVED THE BRUTALITIES OF THE WAR, THE BATAAN DEATH MARCH, THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS, MALARIA, TYPHOID, AND DYSENTERY. THEY HAVE NOW PASSED ON, BUT THEIR BRAVERY AND THEIR PRIDE AS SOLDIERS HAVE NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN BY US, THEIR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN. I OWE IT TO THEM AND ALL THEIR COMRADES, THE VALIANT FILIPINOS WHO RISKED THEIR LIVES FOR THE SAKE OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY TO STAND BEFORE YOU TODAY AND APPEAL TO YOU, OUR HONORABLE LEGISLATORS, TO CORRECT A TRAGIC ERROR OF OMMISSION, AND GIVE THE FILIPINO VETERANS THE DIGNITY AND THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVE.

THE SECOND REASON I AM HERE TODAY IS DUE TO A PROMISE I MADE AS NAFFAA'S NATIONAL CHAIR TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE FOR THE PASSAGE OF THE EQUITY BILL. SINCE NAFFAA WAS BORN TEN YEARS AGO, NAFFAA

HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH FILIPINO VETERANS GROUPS AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATES TO PRESS CONGRESS TO RESCIND A GRIEVOUS ERROR IN JUDGEMENT, A BETRAYAL, CALLED THE RESCISSION ACT OF 1946, BUT CONGRESS TO THIS DAY, MORE THAN 60 YEARS AFTER VICTORY WAS WON, HAS NOT RESPONDED FAVORABLY.

I AM HERE BEFORE YOU TODAY, REPRESENTING MILLIONS OF FILIPINO AMERICANS AND FILIPINOS WHO BELIEVE THAT THE VETERANS EQUITY ISSUE IS A MATTER OF HONOR AND DIGNITY NOT JUST FOR OUR VETERANS BUT FOR THE WHOLE FILIPINO AMERICAN COMMUNITY! IN SEATTLE WHERE I LIVE, I SEE OUR WORLD WAR II VETERANS LIVING IN SUBSTANDARD CONDITIONS, LONELY FOR THEIR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN AND WAITING PATIENTLY FOR THE EQUITY BILL TO PASS SO THAT THEY CAN GO HOME. FOR EXAMPLE, BENITO VALDEZ, 83 YEARS OLD AND JULIAN NICOLAS, 85 YEARS OLD, TWO OF THE LAST THREE REMAINING FILIPINOS WHO HELPED IN THE GREAT RAID THAT RESCUED 600 AMERICAN AND CANADIAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN THE CABANATUAN GARRISON CAMP, LIVE IN MY BELOVED STATE OF WASHINGTON. THESE TWO GALLANT WARRIORS, SILENT IN THEIR ANGUISH AND DISAPPOINTMENT, CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TAKING CONGRESS SO LONG TO CORRECT A BROKEN PROMISE.

TOGETHER WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY, I AM ASKING YOU OUR LEGISLATORS TO SEARCH DEEP INTO YOUR CONSCIENCE AND CORRECT THIS INJUSTICE.

NAFFAA AND ITS PARTNERS IN THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY WILL NOT GIVE UP THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE AND EQUITY. WE WILL CONTINUE YEAR AFTER YEAR AFTER YEAR, BECAUSE MY GENERATION WILL NEVER BE AT PEACE WITH OURSELVES IF WE DO NOT TELL THE STORY OF A PROMISE UNKEPT. WE WILL DO IT BECAUSE WE STILL BELIEVE THAT THIS GREAT COUNTRY CALLED AMERICA IS STILL THE BEACON OF JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS IN THE FREE WORLD. AND THE TIME IS FINALLY HERE TO SHOW THE WHOLE WORLD THAT THIS COUNTRY DOES NOT FORGET THE BRAVERY OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT FOR ITS FREEDOM.

TO THE ESTEEMED MEMBERS OF THE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, WE HOPE THAT YOU WILL ACT HONORABLY ON OUR MESSAGE – THAT THE FILIPINO WORLD WAR II VETERANS HAVE BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY BY THE UNITED STATES DURING THE PAST 61 YEARS. WE ALSO ASK THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO SUPPORT OUR VETERANS' CAUSE AS THEIRS IS AN AMERICAN ISSUE THAT CRIES OUT FOR AMERICAN JUSTICE. I NOW APPEAL TO YOU TODAY AS OUR NATIONAL LEGISLATORS TO PASS THE FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY BILL WITHOUT DELAY.

THANK YOU!